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THE ALCESTIS OF EURIPIDES

NEVINS.

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THE ALCESTIS.

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THE ALCESTIS

OF

EURIPIDES

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY

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S. JOHN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD.

LONDON:

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

1870.

293. f. 23.

INTRODUCTION.

I HAVE CHOSEN this play for translation thinking it might be interesting to the general class of English readers. Euripides is pre-eminently the Greek poet of every-day life. Of him it may be truly said—

> Quidquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira, cupido,
> Gaudia, discursus, nostri est farragp libelli.

He is more like Shakespeare than any other Greek poet, but with this difference: Shakespeare, as he chose, could be familiar or sublime; Euripides' talent and choice both seem to lie in the delineation of those feelings which are common to all men and all conditions of life. Unlike Sophocles, Euripides makes his characters speak more as men and women than kings, queens, &c. In Sophocles we admire the diction and plot, in Euripides the expression of feeling. He is so commonplace, if I may use the term, as at times to be almost comic; and yet he is, as he has been called, the

'most tragic of the poets,' affecting us more than any other tragedian by the emotions of fear and pity. The present play is a good specimen of his character. The plot is simple in the extreme; a middle action is preserved throughout, neither soaring high nor sinking low; but the characters are thoroughly natural, and there are many passages of great tenderness and beauty.

I shall be amply satisfied should this translation be the means of interesting some who are as yet unacquainted with the works of this great poet.

April 9, 1870.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

APOLLO.

DEATH.

CHORUS OF PHEREANS.

ATTENDANTS.

ALCESTIS, Wife of Admetus.

ADMETUS, King of Phere.

EUMELUS, Son of Admetus.

HERCULES.

PHERES, Father of Admetus.

ALCESTIS

APOLLO

HOUSE of Admetus, where, a god myself,
I did endure to share a menial's board.
Zeus was the cause, who did his lightning hurl
Against Asclepius' breast, and slew my son.
Then I enraged, the Cyclops did destroy,
Who forged the thunder-bolt; and, to atone
For this, the Sire Divine compelled me
To be a servant to a mortal man.
So came I to this land, and here did tend
A stranger's flock, and have watched o'er his home,
Till now: for pure myself, in Pheres' son
I found a soul sincere, whom I did save
From death, the Fates outwitting. They to me
Did promise that Admetus should escape
The present death, and in exchange for him
The gods below accept another life.
He all his friends and kin solicited,
His aged sire, and her who gave him birth,
But none could find except his wife, who willed

To die for him, and see the light no more.
She now within the palace lies: her soul
Struggling to burst its earthly tenement,
While nursing arms support her: for this day
She must depart, and bid farewell to life.
And I now quit the roof I love so well,
For fear defilement's breath o'ertake me there.
But lo! grim Death himself I yonder see,
The priest of the departed, who forthwith
Will lead her down unto the world below.
True to his time, and watching for this day
On which she's doomed to die, he hath arrived.

DEATH

What doest thou, Phœbus, at the palace gate,
Haunting this spot? Dost meditate again
Injurious deeds, depriving of their dues
The gods below, their honours limiting?
Wast not enough that thou Admetus' doom
Shouldst bring to naught, with subtle guile the Fates
Outwitting, but must now again be here,
Keep watch and ward, armed with thy bended bow,
O'er Pelias' daughter, who agreed to die
To save her husband?

APOLLO

Fear not, I 've reasons just and sensible.

DEATH

What need this bow, with justice on thy side?

APOLLO

I 'm always wont to bear my bow with me.

DEATH

Yes, and this house unjustly to befriend.

APOLLO

The troubles of my friend I needs must feel.

DEATH

Mean'st thou to rob me of this second corpse ?

APOLLO

I did not take the first by violence.

DEATH

How then still lives he and escapes the grave ?

APOLLO

He gave his wife instead, whom you now seek.

DEATH

Yes, and I 'll take her too beneath the earth.

APOLLO

Take her: I dare not hope to gain you o'er.

DEATH

Gain me to slay those who are doomed to die.

APOLLO

Nay but to slay those who are ripe for death.

DEATH

I guess thy reason and thy argument.

APOLLO

Perchance Alcestis' youth may still be spared?

DEATH

It may not be—my dues I 'll not forego.

APOLLO

Howe'er it be, you gain a single corpse.

DEATH

Those who die young are greater gain to me.

APOLLO

Rich offerings shall crown the grave of age.

DEATH

Phœbus, thy argument is for the rich.

APOLLO

How now! so wise and all unwittingly?

DEATH

Those who have wealth would pay for dying old.

APOLLO

You think not good to grant this favour then?

DEATH

I will not: sure you know my ways by now.

APOLLO

Hateful to men are they, by heaven abhorred.

DEATH

All your unjust desires you 'll not obtain.

APOLLO

Now by my troth, all savage as thou art,
Yet shalt thou learn to stay thy cruel hand.
For there shall come to Pheres' halls a man
Of valour proved, sent by Eurystheus, he
Upon the quest of certain wondrous steeds,
Which he must drive from Thracia's cheerless realms;
Who, in Admetus' palace entertained,
By force shall wrest this lady from thy grasp.

DEATH

Talk as thou likest, all is said in vain.
To Hades' realms most surely she shall come.
Behold I go to dedicate to death
The victim; with this blade, which consecrates
To the gods below him, from whose head it takes
A single hair.

SEMICHORUS

Before the palace silence reigns,
Within its walls no sound is heard.

SEMICHORUS

Without I see none, who may say
How fares the Queen; if dead she claims
Our tears; or if the light of day
Alcestis, Pelias' daughter, sees,
She whom both I and all must own,
The noblest wife that e'er was known.

SEMICHORUS

Canst hear the sound of sighs within,
The smiting of the hand upon the breast,
And lamentation as when all is o'er?
Behold of the attendants none doth rest
In his appointed place the palace gate before.
O Pæan, would that midst these waves of woe
Thou might'st appear with healing on thy wings.

SEMICHORUS

If she were dead they would not thus be mute.

SEMICHORUS

The corpse is not yet carried from the house.

SEMICHORUS

I 'm not so sure: say, wherefore think you so?

SEMICHORUS

It were not like Admetus to conduct
The funeral of such a noble wife
All solitary, and without a friend.

SEMICHORUS

No basin is there at the porch
Of water, as is wont to be
Where lies a corpse within;
Nor yet the lock of hair I see,
Token of mourning for the dead.
Nor hear I yet the maidens smite the breast.

SEMICHORUS

And yet the appointed day is surely come.

SEMICHORUS

How say'st thou ?

SEMICHORUS

On which her downward journey she must take.

SEMICHORUS

It pains my heart and soul to think on it.

SEMICHORUS

'T is meet to sorrow, when we see
The upright and the good who ere have been
Thus utterly consumed with sore distress.

CHORUS

Should one a voyage make
  Or unto Lycia's strand,
Or Ammon's parched seat
  Or any enchanted land,
Yet 't were not possible to save her soul :
For fate draws nigh precipitate and sure.
The sacrificer who may give me help
I know not where to seek, or at what shrine.
One was there, had he lived to see this day,
At whose command she might have left the gates
Of Hades, and the shadowy realms of night,
Waked by whose spell the stricken dead arose
Ere the fell lightning swept him from the earth.

But now all hope is fled.
No rite hath been omitted by our king,
And every altar streams
With blood of victims slain,
But yet no cure is given to heal our woe.
Lo! where from out the house an handmaid comes,
Her face doth stream with tears; what may it be?
'Tis well, when sorrow on thy Lord doth fall,
To mourn; but this I fain would know of thee
Whether thy lady be alive or dead—

ATTENDANT

Call her alive or dead, thou wilt not err.

CHORUS

Alive and dead at once; how may that be?

ATTENDANT

Bowed down to earth, her heartstrings breaking fast.

CHORUS

Unhappy man, how great a loss is thine.

ATTENDANT

As yet he scarce doth comprehend his loss.

CHORUS

Is there no hope that she may yet be spared?

ATTENDANT

It may not be: the fatal day forbids.

CHORUS

Are all the solemn preparations made?

ATTENDANT

The funeral garb her husband hath prepared.

CHORUS

Of this let her be sure, that in her death
She 's glorious, best by far of living wives.

ATTENDANT

Let no man say that she is not the best.
The woman that surpasses her must sure
Be more than mortal. Who could honour more
Her husband than to give her life for his?
Full well her townsmen do acknowledge this,
Admiring what she lately did within.
She, when she felt the fatal day was come,
With water from the stream her fair skin bathed;
Then from the cedar wardrobe where they lay
Bright raiment and rich ornaments she took,
And straight was clad, all fair to look upon.
Therewith before the altár thus she prayed:
'Lady, who watchest o'er Admetus' halls,
Before whose shrine I never more may bow,
Hear the last prayer that I shall make on earth:
Protect my orphan children—grant to her
A noble lord, to him a kindly spouse;
Nor let them fall nipped in youth's opening flower—
Their mother's lot—but in their father's land

Fill up the measure of a prosperous life.'
Each altar wreathed she then with myrtle flowers
Fresh gathered, and at each did offer prayer.
No tear she shed, nor heaved a single sigh;
Death's hand approaching fast no power possessed
To mar the fair complexion of her face.
Her chamber next she entered hastily,
And there in truth one might have seen her weep
Full sore, and weeping thus she made her moan:
'My bridal couch farewell! I love thee still,
Although from thee I do derive my death:
My husband lives. Yet am I loth to bid
To thee and to my lord a last farewell.
Mine own no more! henceforth another bride
Will claim thee, happier in her lot perchance,
But none more chaste and true unto her spouse.'
And now, when she had vented all her grief
In tears, with drooping head she rushed away.
But oft her heart constrained her to return
Again and fall upon her bed once more.
Her children clinging to their mother's robe
Kept weeping: she alternately the while
Embraced them, feeling the approach of death.
Nor ceased the attendants one and all
To weep their mistress, pitying her fate.
She each did greet—nor any of so low
Estate but did some words with her exchange:
Such are the troubles of Admetus' house.

And, had he died, the pang of death alone
Were his; but now, escaped, he doth obtain
A never-ending memory of woe.

CHORUS

I ween Admetus heaveth many a sigh
Now that he needs must lose his noble wife.

ATTENDANT

Aye he doth weep, and in his arms the while
Supports his consort dear and prays her yet
To endure; vain prayer: for she is sick to death
And, sinking fast, doth slowly fade away.
But I will haste your presence to announce.
There are, I ween, who 'mid their sovereign's grief,
Devoid of kindly feeling stand aloof;
But not so you, of old my master's friend.

SEMICHORUS

O Sire divine, give ear, and may there yet
Deliverance and relief from heaven be given.

SEMICHORUS

Doth any appear with news, or must I cut
My locks and robe me in funereal garb?

SEMICHORUS

Too plain, I much do fear; yet let us still
Entreat the gods whose power is infinite.

SEMICHORUS

O Prince Apollo, hear our prayer,
And for Admetus' misery
Some remedy procure: ere now
Thou hast deliverance wrought: O save
Our lady from the power of Death
And bid the murderous king be still.

SEMICHORUS

Ah Pheres' son! how sad a fate is thine
Reft of thy wife!

SEMICHORUS

Enough methinks to make one seek relief
By suicidal hand with rope or knife.

SEMICHORUS

Dear is she, sure of women none so dear,
Whom, ere this day shall close, thou 'lt see expire.

SEMICHORUS

Look, look! in very truth from out the house
Husband and wife I yonder see approach.
Cry out aloud—let thy deep groans resound,
Thou land of Phere, for the best of wives
Who slowly wastes away, her downward road
Pursuing to infernal Hades' bourn.

CHORUS

Ne'er will I say that marriage has more joys
Than sorrows following, when I reckon up

The former and the latter life of him
Our Prince, who, of his noble wife bereft,
Henceforth will lead a life intolerable.

ALCESTIS

Thou sun that light'st the day, and fleeting clouds
That whirl athwart the sky in swift career!

ADMETUS

He sees us twain unhappy; guiltless both
Of any sin 'gainst Heaven to cause thy death.

ALCESTIS

Hear me, O earth! and ye, O palace roofs,
And bridal couches in Iolchus' land!

ADMETUS

Have courage yet! Bear up: forsake me not.
Implore the mighty gods to pity us.

ALCESTIS

Methinks a boat approaches; in the boat
Lo! Charon, he who ferries o'er the dead.
His hand is on his pole. I hear him call:
'Dost linger still? come on, nor hinder me.'
In accents such as these he bids me haste.

ADMETUS

This voyage you speak of bodeth bitter grief.
Ah woe is me, how great is my distress!

ALCESTIS

Some one doth go before me—seest thou not ?—
Unto the hall of spirits leading on.
'T is the winged Lord of Hell. I feel his eye
Beneath his gleaming eyebrows fixed on me.
What wouldst thou ? Stay me not, but let me go
Upon my fated way, with all my load of woe.

ADMETUS

This saddens all who love thee ; most of all
Me and thy children, equally distressed.

ALCESTIS

Cease to support me. Let me lay me down ;
My feet sink under me, my end is near,
Darkness is slowly creeping o'er mine eyes.
My children, fare ye well, your mother is no more !

ADMETUS

O cruel words ! and more intolerable
Than death with all his terrors manifold.
Thou canst not have the heart to leave me thus.
By all the gods I pray thee to bear up
Against the malady that weighs thee down,
For, reft of thee, I can no longer live,
On whom I rest, whose love is all to me.

ALCESTIS

Admetus, for thou seest how 't is with me,
To my last wishes hearken ere I die.

I, valuing not myself compared with thee,
Did give my life for thine ; redeemed by me
Thou dost behold the light. Necessity
Constrained me not: amid Thessalia's sons
Were choice of husbands ; and a princely home
Were mine to enjoy in regal luxury.
But I refused to live when thou wert gone,
My children fatherless ; so I sacrificed
The gifts of youth and all its fresh delights.
And yet thy sire and she who gave thee birth
Forsook thee in the hour of thy need :
Though far advanced in life they would not choose
To save their child and find a glorious death.
Their only child thou wert ; their age forbad
The hope of other heirs when thou wert gone.
And we had lived together through the years
To come ; thou hadst been spared thy widowed state,
Thy orphan children, and thy fruitless sighs.
But Heaven, methinks, has willed that this should be.
Still, howsoe'er it be, forget not thou
The gratitude thou ow'st me for this thing.
An equal recompense I ne'er may ask,
Since nothing is more precious than the soul.
Thyself must own how just is my desire,
Since thou dost love these children equally
As I do—else thou sure wert not thyself.
I pray thee bring them up to rule my house,
Nor let a stepmother be over them,

Who, of inferior origin to me,
Shall, moved by envy, visit them with ill—
I pray thee do me not so great a wrong—
For such doth ever look with evil eye
Upon the children of the former wife;
The poisonous snake hath not more fell intent.
The boy, 'tis true, doth find his sire a tower
Of strength: but how shalt thou, my daughter dear,
Fulfil the years of thy virginity,
If that thy father take an helpmate strange?
Ah me! I fear lest she with slanderous tale
Should blight thy nuptials in youth's opening flower.
For never may thy mother give thy hand
In marriage, nor assist thee in thy pains,
More soothing than aught else in childbirth's hour,
For I am doomed: to-morrow's sun shall rise
And set and rise again, but not for me—
But straightway am I numbered with the dead.
My husband and my children, fare ye well!
And be it yours to boast that ye have lost
In me the best of mothers and of wives.

CHORUS

Fear not, myself will undertake for him
That this shall be, or he shall lose his mind.

ADMETUS

It shall indeed. O entertain no fear,
Faithful to thee in life, in death thou shalt

Alone be mine, and no Thessalian bride
Shall call me husband, throned in thy place.
Not less in royal birth thou dost surpass
All women than in matchless loveliness.
And for my children, I do pray the gods
It may be mine for long to joy in them,
For I might not enjoy my wedded bliss.
Nor shall my grief endure but for a year,
A life-long mourning shall be mine for thee.
With hate I 'll ever look upon my sire,
And loathe the womb that bare me evermore,
Who loved in word alone, but not in deed,
While thou didst part with all that life had dear
To save my soul ; and can I cease to mourn
At losing such a helpmate dear in thee ?
The companies of joyous revellers
With garlands crowned shall tread these halls no more,
The strains of music shall be hushed within,
No more the stringèd lyre my touch shall feel,
The Libyan flute I 'll have no heart to wake,
Life has no joys for me now thou art gone.
Thy image, wrought by the sculptor's cunning hand,
Shall rest upon the bed, and I with arms
Outstretched embracing it shall seem to clasp
My dearest wife in fancy once again ;
A comfort cold, 't is true, and yet perchance
It may relieve the load upon my heart.
Thy spirit will be present in my dreams,

Gladdening my soul; for even in the night
'T is sweet to look upon the loved and lost.
But were the tuneful voice of Orpheus mine,
The power to charm with song the infernal king
And his dread spouse, and rescue thee from hell,
I 'd seek the world below; nor Cerberus,
Nor Charon, ferrier of the dead, who sits
For ever at the oar, should stay my hand,
But I would bring thee back to life again.
Howe'er expect me there when I shall die,
Prepare a home where I may dwell with thee;
For they shall place me in the cedar shroud
Where thou art laid, and stretch me by thy side;
For even in death I would not parted be
From thee, when all were faithless, faithful found.

CHORUS

I too, as doth befit a friend, will take
Part in this mourning, she so well deserves.

ALCESTIS

My children, ye are witnesses this day
How that your father doth his purpose own,
To take no other wife to rule o'er you,
Nor do dishonour to my memory.

ADMETUS

Again I promise, and I 'll keep my vow.

ALCESTIS

On these conditions take my children twain.

ADMETUS

A precious gift by thy dear hand bestowed.

ALCESTIS

Father to these henceforth and mother prove.

ADMETUS

Deprived of thee there 's great necessity.

ALCESTIS

I die when most I need to live for them.

ADMETUS

Ah me! I know not how to bear thy loss.

ALCESTIS

Time soothes all grief; the dead are lost for aye.

ADMETUS

O take me with thee to the world below!

ALCESTIS

It doth suffice that I should die for thee.

ADMETUS

Ah cruel fate which takes so dear a wife!

ALCESTIS

I feel death's darkness heavy on my eyes.

ADMETUS

I 'm clean undone if thou forsak'st me thus.

ALCESTIS

Thou 'lt think of me as one who is no more.

ADMETUS

Lift up thy head ; do not thy children quit.

ALCESTIS

I must perforce. My children, fare ye well !

ADMETUS

Ah ! what is this ? Art sinking ?

ALCESTIS

Fare thee well ! I die forlorn.

CHORUS

'T is past. Admetus' consort is no more.

EUMELUS

Ah woe is me, and well-a-day !
Father, my mother is no more,
And I am left an orphan lone.
Behold her glassy eyes, her arms
That lifeless droop. O mother, hear !
Answer my prayer. 'T is I who call—
'T is I who thee embrace, thy infant child.

ADMETUS

She whom thou dost implore nor sees nor hears ;
This heavy loss afflicts us all alike.

EUMELUS

Ah me, my father, for my mother dear,
By whom I 'm left forlorn, my sister too.
Unhappy, father, was thy bridal hour,
You might not live together to old age:
Thy death, my mother, doth o'erwhelm our house.

CHORUS

Admetus, it is meet you do endure
This sorrow. Know that you are not the first
Nor last of men who hath experienced
The loss of a noble wife—and recollect
Death is the common lot of all mankind.

ADMETUS

I do acknowledge it. Not suddenly
Hath this stroke come upon me; long ago
The thought of it began to wear my heart.
But, for I must ordain the last sad rites,
I pray you bide with me and raise a hymn
Funereal to the ruthless god below.
Behold I do enjoin my subjects all
To share with me this mourning for my wife,
To raze their locks and funeral garb put on.
Ye, too, who drive the teams of harnessed steeds,
And the swift coursers own, must dock their manes.
In the city let nor pipe nor tuneful lyre
Be heard till twelve full months have come and gone;

For never shall I lay within the grave
So dear a corpse; 't is meet that I should pay
Honour to her who gave her life for me.

CHORUS

Daughter of Pelias, mayst thou rest
Within the sunless halls below,
Even in Hades not unblest.
Let the black-haired lord of the tomb be sure,
And the aged ferryman of the dead
As he guides the rudder and plies the oar,
That the lady of all who have gone before,
Far, far the noblest and the best
Acheron's still waters is passing o'er.
On the seven-stringed lyre the band of bards
Shall hymn thy praise and in vocal strains,
When the Carneian month comes round,
In Sparta's halls, what time the moon
All night doth ride in the heavens high,
And in Athens the city of gladness and light.
For thou alone, of women dear,
Thy husband savedst from the grave,
At price of thine own soul.
Light lie the earth upon thy tomb!
Should thy lord take another wife,
I and thy children equally
Will loathe and hate him evermore.
The mother had no heart to lie

Within the grave to save her child,
The aged sire might not endure—
A grey-haired pair, they dared not die.
Thou in the prime of youth couldst quit
The realms of light; may it be mine
To go through life with such a spouse,
A lot most rare, devoid of pain.

HERCULES

Ye friendly villagers of Pheres' land,
Doth King Admetus keep at home to-day?

CHORUS

You 'll find him in the palace, Hercules.
But say what chance directs your steps thus far
To Pheres' city and Thessalia's land?

HERCULES

I 'm sent upon a work by Tiryns' king.

CHORUS

Is 't a long journey? Whither are you bound?

HERCULES

The team of Thracian Diomede is my quest.

CHORUS

A hard one; for methinks you have no friend.

HERCULES

'T is true: the Bistones' land is strange to me.

CHORUS

You may not win these steeds in peaceable guise.

HERCULES

Nor may I dare refuse the task I 'm set.

CHORUS

Or death or victory awaits you there.

HERCULES

I 've been engaged ere now in like contests.

CHORUS

What seek you more, their master vanquished?

HERCULES

I 'll drive away these steeds to Tiryns' king.

CHORUS

'T is no such easy task to bridle them.

HERCULES

Unless their nostrils vomit fire, I 'll do it.

CHORUS

They soon tear men in pieces with their teeth.

HERCULES

Not horses but wild beasts devour such food.

CHORUS

You 'll see their mangers dabbled o'er with blood.

HERCULES

Whose son is he who bred these coursers fierce?

CHORUS

His title is the Lord of the Golden Shield
Of Mars; his sire the direful God of War.

HERCULES

My fortune sure this task right well befits.
For ever hard and toilsome is my lot
Since that I needs must fight with Ares' sons;
Lyceon first, and Cycnus next, and now
Must these fierce coursers and their lord engage;
But none shall ever see Alcmena's son
Shrink from encountering the enemy.

CHORUS

Behold himself the sovereign of our land,
Admetus yonder issues from the house.

ADMETUS

Hail, Jove-born prince of Perseus' royal line!

HERCULES

Well met Admetus, lord of Thessaly.

ADMETUS

I would 't were so. Your kindly heart I know.

HERCULES

What means this mournful cutting of the hair?

ADMETUS

This day I lay a corpse within the tomb.

HERCULES

Pray heaven thy children may be free from ill!

ADMETUS

My children are alive within the house.

HERCULES

If 't is thy sire, I ween he 's ripe for death.

ADMETUS

My parents, Hercules, are alive and well.

HERCULES

Surely thy wife Alcestis is not dead?

ADMETUS

Of her I have a double tale to tell.

HERCULES

Speak'st thou of her as being alive or dead?

ADMETUS

She is, and she is not—but me she pains.

HERCULES

I know no more. Your speech is hid from me.

ADMETUS

Wert ignorant of her impending fate?

HERCULES

I know that she agreed to die for thee.

ADMETUS

How lives she then who is to death devote?

HERCULES

Grieve not for ills that in the future lie.

ADMETUS

Who is to die is dead: who is dead is gone.

HERCULES

To be and not to be are thought unlike.

ADMETUS

Hercules, you judge in your way, I in mine.

HERCULES

Why mourn'st thou then? which of thy friends is dead?

ADMETUS

A woman; we did speak of her but now.

HERCULES

A stranger or allied to thee in blood?

ADMETUS

A stranger but connected with my house.

HERCULES

How came it then to pass that here she died?

ADMETUS

Her father lost, she dwelt an orphan here.

HERCULES

I would I had not found thee sorrowing.

ADMETUS

What signifies this word that dropt from thee?

HERCULES

I 'll on my way to seek another host.

ADMETUS

Not so. Thou wilt not do me such a wrong.

HERCULES

The coming guest doth trouble a mourner's house.

ADMETUS

Speak no more of the dead, but go within.

HERCULES

It is a shame to feast with friends that weep.

ADMETUS

I 'll bring thee to the chamber kept for guests.

HERCULES

I pray thee as a favour let me go.

ADMETUS

It may not be that thou another's hearth
Shouldst seek. You, sir, lead on, and opening wide
The rooms of entertainment out of sight
Of the palace, the attendants straight enjoin
To set on store of viands, and shut close
The inner doors. It is not right that guests
At meat should be disturbed by sounds of woe.

CHORUS

What meanest thou, Admetus, in this time
Of grief thus inadvised to welcome guests?

ADMETUS

But had I from my city and my halls
Dismissed the coming guest, should I have earned
Your praise? Methinks I should not, since my woe
Not one whit less had grown, but I unkind
To strangers as I ne'er had been before;
And, in addition to my other ills,
My house would have been called inhospitable,
While I in him do find the best of friends
Whene'er I visit Argos' thirsty soil.

CHORUS

How then couldst thou conceal thy present lot
If he be such a friend as thou dost say?

ADMETUS

He never would have brooked to pass my doors
Had he known all the nature of my grief.
Methinks in this I were not wholly wise,
Nor free from blame—but this house knows not how
To send a guest dishonoured on his way.

CHORUS

O liberal and hospitable house,
In which the Pythian god, the Lyrist sweet,
Erst deigned to dwell;

What time he did pursue the life of a swain
Beneath thy roof, adown the mountain slopes
Trilling to the flocks the shepherd's nuptial song.
Straight by the witching melody beguiled
The brindled pard and tawny lion left
Behind the dells of Othrys and came down
Trooping to hear thy song.
From beyond the pine woods dark
Nimbly skipped the dappled fawn,
Delighting in the gladsome strain
And dancing to thy tuneful lyre.
For this, beside fair Bœbe's placid stream
He 's rich in kine beyond all other men,
And bounds his acres broad and pastures green
By the Molossian region towards the side
Where the slope sun doth stall his fiery steeds;
And far as the Ægean's storm-bound coast
He rules in Pelion.
E'en now he doth his doors ope wide,
To entertain a friend; his eye still moist
With tears for his loved wife, who lies within,
But now cut off from life.
His noble nature cannot help but show
Feeling for others—surely in the good
Wisdom doth find her home;
But, when I think upon it, I do feel
An innate confidence that one who thus
Reveres the gods must come to joy at last—

ADMETUS

Kind citizens, ye are present in good time;
Already the attendants do prepare
To bear aloft the corpse all duly decked
Toward the funeral pyre and the tomb.
Ye therefore now the solemn dirge upraise
As on her last long journey forth she goes.

CHORUS

Lo where thy sire with the trembling step of age
Approaches; in their hands his servants bear
Rich raiment wherewithal to deck the dead.

PHERES

I come to sympathise in this thy grief,
My son; none can deny that thou hast lost
A consort chaste and true—but yet 't is meet
Thou do endure this loss though hard to bear.
Accept this gift of raiment, wherewith decked
She may descend into the tomb; 't is meet
To honour the corpse of her who died for thee,
But for whose death I had been childless left
To pine away in solitary age.
A glorious life for women to admire
Is hers who hath achieved this noble deed.
O saviour of my son, who hast upraised
Us fallen low, may it be well with thee
Even in the realms of Hades! Sure I am
There 's happiness in a marriage such as this,
Or else it were not good that man should wed.

ADMETUS

I did not bid thee to this funeral,
Nor do I reckon thee amongst my friends.
Raiment of thine she never shall put on,
Nor, needing aught of thine, be laid in the grave.
'T was meet to mourn when *I* was nigh to death,
But then thou stood'st aloof—old as thou wert—
And didst behold her young life sacrificed.
And dost thou now lament her lifeless corpse?
In truth I ween thou never wert my sire
And my reputed mother bore me not.
Methinks 't is servile blood flows in my veins,
And to a changeling did thy wife give suck.
Thy nature has been tried and clearly proved,
And I no longer count myself thy son.
Most craven of all men thou dost appear,
Who, when so full of years, and on the brink
Of the grave, hadst neither heart nor wish to die
To save thy son, but ye did both permit
Another to perform this: she whom I
Father to me and mother e'er shall own.
And yet methinks it were a goodly work
To die for me, thy child—thy coming years
Were few at best, and short the time I ween:
And we had lived together all our lives,
Nor I been left to mourn in solitude.
And yet thou hast enjoyed in thy time
As much good fortune as man well may have.

In the prime of manhood seated on the throne,
With me, thy son, to inherit thine estate.
Nor was there any fear lest, at thy death,
Strangers should riot in these desolate halls.
Thou ne'er canst say that I abandoned thee
To death, through light esteem, who ever was
Most thoughtful for thy weal—and 't is for this
Ye both requite me in such pitiful guise.
Go now; and with all speed haste to beget
Fresh sons to tend thee in advancing age,
To deck thy corpse and lay thee out when dead;
For I will ne'er perform thine obsequies,
Since, for all thou dost care, I might be dead.
But, if another saviour doth appear
Through whom I see this light, I do esteem
Myself his child, the nurse of his old age.
Fondly do aged people court release,
Scorning old age and a long term of life:
Soon as the hour arrives, they wish no more
For death nor irksome feel the weight of years.

CHORUS

Prithee be still. We need not further pain.
O son, seek not to irritate thy sire!

PHERES

Dost take me for some purchased slave, my son,
Libyan or Phrygian, food for thy abuse,
Nor know'st Thessalian blood flows in my veins,

A free-born son of a Thessalian sire?
Know, headstrong youth, thou shalt not on my head
Vent with impunity these insolent words.
True, I begat thee prince of these my halls,
But I'm not therefore bound to die for thee;
My father left me no such ordinance,
Nor doth this law prevail among the Greeks
That fathers should choose death to save their sons.
Happy or not thou for thyself dost live,
And all that thou canst claim of me is thine.
Thou art lord of a great people: at my death
Many broad acres shall I leave to thee,
Which I did erst inherit from my sire.
Say, then, in what consists my crime or fraud?
Do not thou die for me nor I for thee.
Thou lovest the light of life, and why dost think
That it should not be equally sweet to me?
Full well I ween the time beyond the tomb
Is long, and life is short but sweet withal.
Thou didst contend with death, and shamefully
Didst 'scape thy doom, the murderer of thy wife.
And dost thou now my cowardice reprove?
Thou craven soul by a woman vanquished,
Who died for thee a goodly youth I trow!
Subtly hast thou discovered a way
By which thou ever mayst avoid thy doom;
From time to time persuading each new wife
To die for thee—and dost thou then revile

Out of thy coward heart thy kith and kin
Whoever are unwilling to do this?
Silence, I say! And bear this well in mind,
All men alike love life—not thou alone.
Vent not reproach on me or thou 'lt receive
Rebukes in plenty and well merited.

CHORUS

'T is more than time these angry words should cease.
Old man, continue not to abuse thy son.

ADMETUS

Since I have spoken, say what thou dost list.
But yet bethink thee, if to hear the truth
Mislike thee, 't is the punishment of thy sin.

PHERES

To die for thee had been far greater sin.

ADMETUS

Dost think age feels death's stroke as much as youth?

PHERES

Man ought to live with one life not with two.

ADMETUS

I ween you'd like to outlive the years of Zeus.

PHERES

You curse your parents, though without just cause.

ADMETUS

Yea, for I felt you thirsted for long life.

PHERES

Did not she die for you, whose corpse you bear?

ADMETUS

Base wretch, a token of thy cowardice!

PHERES

I killed her not. You never can say this.

ADMETUS

I hope some time you 'll fall into my strait.

PHERES

Woo many wives that more may die for thee.

ADMETUS

This taunt befits thee, since thou wouldst not die.

PHERES

The light of the sun is sweet to look upon.

ADMETUS

How craven and unmanly is thy heart.

PHERES

You scoff not when you bury an aged corpse.

ADMETUS

Dishonoured shalt thou be, when thou dost die.

PHERES

I care not for my name when I'm no more.

ADMETUS

Ah me! how shameless doth old age appear!

PHERES

Thy lady was not shameless but too fond.

ADMETUS

I pray thee go and let me bury my dead.

PHERES

I will depart: thou, murderer, shalt lay
Within the tomb the corpse thyself did kill.
But know her kin will visit this on thee—
Acastus merits not the name of man
Unless he do his sister's death revenge.

ADMETUS

Confusion seize on thee, and on thy wife!
And may a childless age your portion be;
For never shall ye enter my abode.
And could I by the herald's voice disclaim
My parentage, I would not hesitate.
But since the mournful duty on us laid
Brooks not delay, let us begone and haste
To lay the corpse upon the funeral pyre

CHORUS

O good and noble heart farewell!
May the conductor of the dead
And may the lord of the grave be kind
To thee who hast so much endured.
If, in the world below, the good
Receive a portion fairer than the rest,
Be such thy lot, by Hades' throned queen.

ATTENDANT

Full many a guest from many a varied clime
Admetus hath receivèd in these halls,
Whom I have served, but never yet have seen
Beneath this roof a stranger so ill bred.
Who, first of all, seeing my master's grief,
Would notwithstanding pass into the house ;
And then did in no sober mood partake
Of the fare we set before him, but would call
And bid us haste to bring what he might list.
And raising in both hands the beaker wreathed
With ivy, drank the pure juice of the grape;
Till, heated with the circumambient fumes,
Wreathing his head with myrtle, he began
To howl most barbarous ditties. Then arose
Two opposite strains; for he, Admetus' grief
Respecting not, kept singing, while we wept
Aloud our mistress, but did hide our tears
From the guest, for so Admetus did enjoin.
And I must now go wait upon this man
Who is no better than some villanous thief.
And she is gone, my lady; nor might I
Attend her to the grave nor make my moan
O'er her who was a mother to us all,
Soothing her husband's ire; and can I help
But loathe the sight of him who hath arrived
To trouble us in the midst of our distress?

HERCULES

Why dost thou look so heavy and so sad?
A countenance so gloomy and o'ercast
Befits not an attendant, one who ought
To greet the coming guest with cheerful mien.
Thou, on the contrary, with sullen brow
And frowning didst receive thy master's friend,
Out of concern for no domestic loss.
Come hither now, that thou mayst grow more wise.
Dost know the nature of all human things?
'Tis like thou shouldst not; listen then to me.
Death is the common lot of all mankind,
Nor breathes there any man who is assured
That he will live to see the morrow close.
The course of fate lies hid in darkness—none
By science or by art may master it.
Since now I have instructed thee in this,
Cheer up, drink wine, consider each new day
Thou livest is thine, and leave the rest to fate.
Nor yet forget that thou the Cyprian Queen
Revere, for she to mortals is most kind
Of all the gods, and owns the tenderest heart.
Abandon other cares and my advice
Obey, if that I seem to speak aright.
Methinks I do. Wilt thou not then dismiss
This unrestrained grief and come within
These doors, and wreathe thy head and drink with me?

Full well I trow the plashing of the wine
Will rouse thee from this stiff and constrained mood.
And, since we are but men, we should eschew
Unnatural feelings; for, as I opine,
To all of sad and gloomy countenance
Life is no boon, but rather a distress.

ATTENDANT

You say well—but just now our state is one
Which mirth and revelling do not befit.

HERCULES

It is a stranger woman who is dead.
Grieve not then to excess, when you do know
The lord and lady of this house are well.

ATTENDANT

How so? you must be ignorant of our loss.

HERCULES

Not unless your lord misled me purposely.

ATTENDANT

He's hospitable even to excess.

HERCULES

Is't meet I suffer for a stranger's death?

ATTENDANT

Much like a stranger in good sooth was she.

HERCULES

Can it be that he concealed the truth from me?

ATTENDANT

No more: to us pertain our sovereign's ills.

HERCULES

This speech betokens not a distant loss.

ATTENDANT

I had not else grieved at thy wassailing.

HERCULES

I have been strangely treated by mine host.

ATTENDANT

You came at an unseasonable hour,
For grief lays heavy on us; and you see
This close-cut hair and black array of robes.

HERCULES

Is 't one of his children or his aged sire?

ATTENDANT

Know then, O stranger, 't is his wife that 's dead!

HERCULES

O heaven! and yet you entertained me here.

ATTENDANT

He ill could brook to send you on your way.

HERCULES

Unhappy man! O what a loss is thine!

ATTENDANT

We are all brought low; there 's more than one death here.

HERCULES

Well so I thought at first, soon as I saw
His tear-stained visage and close razed locks.
But he declared it was a stranger corpse
He bore to burial, and so worked on me.
Thus I, against my feelings, passed within
His doors and in these hospitable halls
Began to drink and he so sore distressed.
And then to think that I should thus carouse
With garlands crowned! but it was all your fault
Who did conceal from me your sad estate.
Where lies the place where they do bury her?
And whither going may I light on him?

ATTENDANT

Without the suburbs on the Larissan road
The tomb of polished stone will meet your view.

HERCULES

Now my enduring heart and daring soul
Discover what a son Alcmena bore
Electryon's daughter to almighty Jove.
For I must save this lady, who but now
Has died, and seat her in these halls once more,
And to Admetus do a service true.
I go, and for grim Death will watch. Methinks
I shall beside the tomb discover him,
Drinking the sacrificial victim's blood.
And if, from out my lurking-place, I chance

To spring upon him and once clasp him tight
Within these arms, I 'll rack his ribs with pain;
And none shall set him free till he restore
The lady to my hand. But should I miss
This quest, and should grim Death forbear to come
To the gory feast that waits him, I 'll descend
Unto the sunless realms, where Proserpine
And her dread lord preside; and I feel sure
My prayer will move them, and that I shall lead
Alcestis back, and place her in the hands
Of my dear host, who bid me welcome kind
Nor would reject me though o'erpowered with grief,
But, from regard for me, concealed his loss.
Who of Thessalia's sons so hospitable ?
Or who in any part of Greece that dwells ?
Ne'er shall this noble soul have cause to say
That he a thankless wight did benefit.

ADMETUS

Ah me! the sight of these my widowed halls
Doth sicken me; I shrink from the approach.
I know not where to go or where to stay.
I know not what to say, nor can from speech refrain.
Death were a boon to me.
Unhappy was the hour that saw my birth.
I envy the departed—it were bliss
To be with them. No longer seems it sweet
To look upon the sun or walk the earth,

Since death hath robbed me of my consort dear
And Hades hath received my only joy.

CHORUS

Advance, and in thy chamber seek repose.

ADMETUS

Alack the day!

CHORUS

Your sorrow needs to seek relief in groans.

ADMETUS

O misery!

CHORUS

You have been sorely tried I know full well.

ADMETUS

O lamentable day!

CHORUS

You will not help the dead by tears or sighs.

ADMETUS

O woe is me!

CHORUS

No more to see the face of a loved wife
Is full of pain.

ADMETUS

You call to mind what sorely wounds my heart.
No crueller stroke can fall on man than this,
A faithful wife cut off. I do lament
My espousals and my wedded life, and look

With envy on the childless souls and lorn,
Whom but one life concerns, for which to grieve
Were such a burden as might well be borne.
But it doth pass endurance to behold
Our children sicken and our bridal couch
Laid desolate by the hand of death; and feel
We might have chosen once a single life,
Without or wife or child to cause us pain.

CHORUS

Fate comes which none may safely grapple with.

ADMETUS

O woe is me!

CHORUS

We cannot fix the limit of our ills.

ADMETUS

O bitter day!

CHORUS

'T is hard to bear, but still——

ADMETUS

Unhappy that I am!

CHORUS

Endure; you're not the first man who hath lost
His wife—misfortune straitens all mankind,
In one shape or another visiting them.

ADMETUS

O sorrow that shall long survive and pain
For those we love on whom the grave hath closed.

I fain had cast me down in the vaulted tomb,
And lain with her the noblest of the dead.
Two faithful souls dread Hades then had gained
Together crossing the still Stygian stream.

CHORUS

I had one near of kin who lost a son,
Most worthy to be mourned, his only child.
But for all that, though verging on grey hairs,
And far advanced in life, he bore his loss
With resignation and endurance meet.

ADMETUS

O palace mine, whose frontal greets my eye,
I know not how to enter, how to dwell
Within thee—such a change hath passed on me.
Erstwhile I did approach thee by the gleam
Of torches; to the sound of nuptial songs
Clasping the hand of my loved wife I went.
A joyous band the while our steps pursued
Sounding, until the echoes rang again,
Our happy lot, our mutual royal birth.
Instead of the marriage song doth now arise
The sound of wailing, while black livery
Replaces the white marriage robes: forlorn
And desolate my chamber and my bed.

CHORUS

When that thy lot seemed brightest, then did fall
This sorrow on thee; still thou hast preserved

Thine own life; and the memory of thy wife
Is dear and shall abide. 'T is no new thing.
Full many a wedded pair the hand of death
Has visited and ta'en the wife away.

ADMETUS

My friends, although methinks it may seem strange,
I do account my wife's the happier lot.
Sorrow no more may touch her: she has passed
Away from every trouble crowned with fame.
While me, escaped the death that was my due,
A wretched life awaits. I feel this now.
How shall I bear my palace to approach?
Who 'll meet me at the entrance greeting sweet
To take or proffer? whither can I turn?
Within, the lonely scene doth drive me forth,
When I behold the bed whereon she lay,
The throne whereon she sat untenanted,
The cheerless threshold—while my children weep
Their mother, clinging to my knees the while,
And for their mistress lost the servants moan.
Such is the scene within—while, out of doors,
Thessalian brides, and concourses of dames
Affright me—for I never could endure
To look on those who mind me of my wife.
Meantime, who ever hates me, thus will say:
'Lo yonder man, who lives in shameful guise:
He did not dare to look death in the face,

But let his wife die for him and thus 'scaped
The grave: and doth he call himself a man?
Afraid to die himself, he yet abhors
His parents.' In addition to my ills
I shall thus evilly be reported of.
How then, my friends, can it be gain to live
Unhappy in my fate and in my fame?

CHORUS

I'm master of the minstrel art divine,
Versed in the lore which reads the starry heavens,
And many a science have erstwhile explored,
But never charm have found to stay the power
Of dire Necessity—nor magic spell
On Orpheus' tablets graved, nor potent salves
Which to Asclepius' ever-toiling sons
Great Phœbus gave as antidotes to pain.
Alone of the immortals none to her
May access have—nor altars she
Nor shrined image hath, nor lends an ear
By bloody sacrifice propitiate.
O goddess dread! I pray thee come not near
More terrible than in the years gone by.
E'en the decrees which mighty Zeus ordains
The power to enforce them rests with thee.
Thou dost beat down the tried Chalybian steel
And no rash spirit may prevail with thee.
Thee too, Admetus, hath the goddess ta'en,

Caught in the toils which none may seek to escape.
But yet cheer up—tears will not raise the dead
Nor bring them back to life from the realms below.
E'en they who boast a heavenly birth do fade
And pass away amid the shades of death.
We loved thy lady—still is she
Though lost to sight to memory dear.
The noblest wife that e'er was wed
Didst thou espouse upon thy bridal day.
Let not the spot where she doth rest
Be lightly thought of as the graves
Where lie the all-forgotten dead.
Honour divine to her belongs—
Henceforth she is the genius of this shore.
The traveller shall turn aside
To greet her shrine and thus shall say
'To save her husband once she died
And now she lives a spirit blest.
Lady, thy grace we do implore,
And mayst thou bless us on our way.'
So shall men speak of her in time to come.
But look, as I do think, Alcmena's son,
Admetus, yonder comes towards thy house.

HERCULES

Admetus, to a friend one should speak out
One's thoughts, and not in secret entertain
Reproach within one's heart—and I, methinks,

Possessed the right to be esteemed your friend,
Arriving as I did amidst your grief.
But you concealed from me the bitter truth,
Nor knew I that your wife lay dead within,
But thought you mourned a distant relative.
And so I wreathed my head and to the gods
Libations poured in your unhappy house.
I feel that you have wronged me much in this,
But still I would not grieve you in your pain.
And now the reason why I'm thus returned
I 'll tell you. Prithee keep this woman here,
Till with the Thracian coursers I return,
Having slain the tyrant of the Bistones.
But should I fail—which may the gods prevent,
For I do trust that I shall soon return—
Then keep her for a handmaid in thy house.
I did not come by her without much toil;
For chancing on some who did institute
A contest for the Athletes, I obtained
This woman as the prize of victory.
He who was speediest in the nimble race
Obtained a team of horses as his meed;
While to the conqueror in the nobler strife,
The wrestling and the cestus, a whole drove
Of oxen and a woman fell besides.
Methought it were a pitiful thing to lose
The chance of so distinguished a prize.
But, as I said before, it appertains

To you to keep this woman—not by stealth,
But with much labour I obtained her;
Perchance, too, I shall earn your thanks ere long.

ADMETUS

'T was not because I held you not my friend,
Or with intent to slight you that I hid
My wife's unhappy fate; but to my grief
Grief had been added, if you had set out
To seek the shelter of another's roof—
Enough for me to weep my own ill fate.
But if 't is possible, I pray you, prince,
To some Thessalian conduct this maid,
Who hath been spared such sufferings as are mine,
For you have many friends in Pheres' land,
Nor thus remind me ever of my woe.
I could not check my tears were I to see
Her in this house. Seek not fresh suffering
To lay on one who suffers to o'erflow;
My present misery weighs me down enough.
Where might her youth, for by her ornaments
And dress I judge she's young, bestow herself?
She ill could dwell beneath a roof where men
Inhabit, or without sustaining harm
Mix with the youths. Thou knowest, Hercules,
'T is no light task to check the fire of youth.
And I am taking thought for thee in this.
But should I to the chamber of the dead

Conduct her and instal her there, I fear
A twofold blame would then recoil on me.
My people would reproach me that I proved
False to the memory of her who saved
My life, this young maid taking to my bed.
And secondly the wishes of the dead
How to fulfil must be my deep concern,
For she the highest reverence doth claim.
But thou, whoe'er thou art, O woman, know
That thou in stature and in form dost seem
Alcestis' very counterpart. Ah me!
For heaven's sake lead this lady from my sight,
And slay not one who is already slain.
For when I look on her I seem to see
Before me my lost wife in bodily form.
My heart within me is disturbed thereat,
The well-springs of my tears burst forth anew.
O miserable and wretched that I am,
How bitter is the pang I but now feel!

CHORUS

I cannot call this chance a happy one;
Still man must bear the gift a god bestows.

HERCULES

Would that I did indeed the power possess
To bring thy wife unto the realms of day
From out the mansions of the nether world,
And render thee a grateful offering!

ADMETUS

I'm sure thou wouldst an it were possible,
But none may raise the dead to life again.

HERCULES

Let not thy feelings overmaster thee,
Be moderate in the measure of thy grief.

ADMETUS

'T is easier to advise than to submit.

HERCULES

What boots it should you groan for evermore?

ADMETUS

An overpowering feeling masters me.

HERCULES

The loss of the departed claims a tear.

ADMETUS

Her loss hath crushed me more than I can tell.

HERCULES

You 've lost a noble wife unquestionably.

ADMETUS

Life hath no joy for me now she is gone.

HERCULES

Time will relieve you. Now your grief's but fresh.

ADMETUS

If time and death are one, you say aright.

HERCULES

Some new bride, some new love will soothe your pains.

ADMETUS

Oh hush! It were a thought unutterable.

HERCULES

Dost mean to keep for aye a widower's bed?

ADMETUS

No woman by my side shall ever lie.

HERCULES

And think you this will benefit the dead?

ADMETUS

Where'er she is I needs must honour her.

HERCULES

And rightly. Still you're courting ridicule.

ADMETUS

Thou ne'er shalt call me bridegroom, Hercules.

HERCULES

I praise your constancy towards your wife.

ADMETUS

When I unto the memory of the dead
Unfaithful prove, may death be my reward.

HERCULES

Admit this lady to thy noble halls.

ADMETUS

Spare me, I pray thee by thy mighty sire.

HERCULES

And yet you will do wrong not heeding me.

ADMETUS

But should I do your bidding, I shall be
Henceforth a prey to all-consuming grief.

HERCULES

This favour may perchance a duty prove.

ADMETUS

I would thou ne'er hadst borne this prize away.

HERCULES

And yet in this my victory thou hast part.

ADMETUS

Well said. Let then this lady go her way.

HERCULES

She shall if need be—but take thought afresh.

ADMETUS

There is need, if you would not anger me.

HERCULES

I have a meaning in this eagerness.

ADMETUS

Well have your way, although it likes me not.

HERCULES

The time will come when you will give me thanks.

ADMETUS

If I must take her, lead her now within.

HERCULES

I would not trust her to the attendants' care.

ADMETUS

Prithee yourself conduct her to the house.

HERCULES

Nay, I must place her in your very hands.

ADMETUS

Nay, I 'll not touch her, but she may proceed
Within my house.

HERCULES

I'll trust her not to any hand but thine.

ADMETUS

You do constrain me, prince, against my will.

HERCULES

Put forth thy hand and dare to touch her now.

ADMETUS

I do it, as I would touch the Gorgon's head.

HERCULES

Dost hold her now ?

ADMETUS

Even so.

HERCULES

Retain her then,
And thou shalt own the son of Jove did prove
A right royal guest. Toward her turn thine eyes,
And say if she resembleth not thy wife.
Rest happy now, and all thy pain forget.

ADMETUS

O ye immortal gods! what can I say
At this unhoped, unlooked for miracle?
Do I in truth behold my wife, or doth
Some phantom of delight o'erpower my sense?

HERCULES

This is no phantom but your own true wife.

ADMETUS

Art sure she is no ghost from the nether world?

HERCULES

You did not think a sorcerer was your guest.

ADMETUS

Is this my wife whom I did lay i' the grave?

HERCULES

Be sure of it, although you well may doubt.

ADMETUS

May I touch her and accost her as alive?

HERCULES

Address her, for you have your whole desire.

ADMETUS

O form and feature of my dearest wife,
Against all hope thou once again art mine!

HERCULES

Thou hast her, and may heaven not jealous prove!

ADMETUS

Most noble offspring of Imperial Jove,
May fortune wait on thee, and may thy sire
Preserve thee who hast saved me and mine!
But say how didst thou bring her from the grave
To the world above?

HERCULES

I did with Death engage.

ADMETUS

Where lies the spot which witnessed this contest?

HERCULES

The new-made grave—where I did lay in wait,
And springing forth enclosed him in these arms.

ADMETUS

Why stands my lady thus bereft of voice?

HERCULES

You may no word or utterance hear from her
Till the third day come and the spell be broke

By which she 's dedicate to the gods below.
But lead her in, Admetus ; and henceforth
Continue to respect the stranger-guest.
And now farewell: for I must not delay
The task I'm set by Sthenelus' royal son.

ADMETUS

Abide with us and share our hearth awhile.

HERCULES

Another time, but now I must begone.

ADMETUS

Well, may you soon return with victory crowned !
Meantime to all my subjects I enjoin,
In every district over which I rule,
That they do festal dances institute
For this glad issue, and let thankful prayers
Amid the smoke of sacrifice ascend.
For now a happier life than heretofore
Is ours, and I must own my lot is blest.

CHORUS

The visitations sent by heaven to men
Are manifold ; and all against our hope
The gods fulfil the issues of events,
And things come not to pass as we expect :
Heaven finds a way of escape where man sees none.
So happily doth end this tragedy.

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——— Philosophy of Necessity..... 10
——— on Force..... 10
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BUCKLE'S History of Civilization 2
BULL'S Hints to Mothers 28
——— Maternal Management of Children 28
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——— Memoirs..... 5
BUNSEN (E. DE) on Apocrypha 21
———'s Keys of St. Peter..... 21
BURKE'S Vicissitudes of Families..... 5
BURTON'S Christian Church..... 4
———Vikram and the Vampire 24

Cabinet Lawyer 28

CALVERT'S Wife's Manual..... 21
CATES'S Biographical Dictionary 5
CATS' and FARLIE'S Moral Emblems 16
Changed Aspects of Unchanged Truths 9
CHESNEY'S Euphrates Expedition..... 22
——— Indian Polity 3
——— Waterloo Campaign..... 2
CHILD'S Physiological Essays 15
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COLENSO (Bishop) on Pentateuch and Book of Joshua 20
Commonplace Philosopher in Town and Country 9
CONINGTON'S Chemical Analysis 14
——— Translation of VIRGIL'S *Æneid*..... 26
CONTANSEAU'S French-English Dictionaries 8
CONYBEARE and HOWSON'S Work on St. Paul 19
COOK on the Acts 19
COOK'S Voyages 5
COOPER'S Surgical Dictionary..... 14
COPLAND'S Dictionary of Practical Medicine 15
COTTON'S Introduction to Confirmation.... 19
COULTHART'S Decimal Interest Tables 20
Counsel and Comfort from a City Pulpit.... 9
COX'S (G. W.) Aryan Mythology..... 4
———Manual of Mythology 4
———Tales of the Great Persian War 2
———Tales of Ancient Greece 25
——— (H.) Ancient Parliamentary Elections 1
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——— Whig and Tory Administrations 1
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CUSACK'S History of Ireland..... 3

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D'AUBIGNE'S History of the Reformation in the time of CALVIN 2
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DAYMAN'S Dante's Divina Commedia 20
Dead Shot (The), by MARKSMAN 26
DE LA RIVE'S Treatise on Electricity 12
DENISON'S Vice-Regal Life 1
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DOBSON on the Ox 27
DOVE on Storms 11
DOYLE'S Fairyland 26
DYER'S City of Rome 3

EASTLAKE's Life of Gibson 16
——— Hints on Household Taste 17
——— History of Oil Painting 16
EDMUNDS's Names of Places 9
EDWARDS's Shipmaster's Guide..... 27
Elements of Botany 18
ELLICOTT's Commentary on Ephesians 19
——— Lectures on Life of Christ..... 19
——— Commentary on Galatians 19
——— Pastoral Epist. 19
——— Philippians,&c. 19
——— Thessalonians 19
Essays and Contributions of A. K. H. B..... 8
Essays and Reviews 21
EWALD's History of Israel..... 20

FAIRBAIRN on Iron Shipbuilding 18
——— ———'s Application of Cast and Wrought Iron to Building 18
——— Information for Engineers .. 18
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——— Tropical World 13
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HOOKER and WALKER-ARNOTT's British Flora 13
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——— Compendium of ditto 20
How we Spent the Summer 22
HOWARD's Gymnastic Exercises 15
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——— Northern Heights of London.... 24
——— Rural Life of England..... 24
——— Visits to Remarkable Places.... 24
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INGELOW's Poems 25
——— Story of Doom 25
——— Mopsa 25

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——— Legends of the Madonna..... 17
——— Legends of the Monastic Orders 17
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Lord's Prayer Illustrated 25
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Lyra Eucharistica 22
——— Germanica 18, 21
——— Messianica 22
——— Mystica..... 22

Mabeldean 24
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——— Lays of Ancient Rome 25
——— Miscellaneous Writings 9
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——— Scientific and Literary Treasury..... 12
——— Treasury of Knowledge..... 22
——— Treasury of Natural History 12
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MELVILLE'S Digby Grand..... 25
——— General Bounce 25
——— Gladiators 25
——— Good for Nothing 25
——— Holmby House 25
——— Interpreter..... 25
——— Kate Coventry 25
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——— England and Ireland..... 6
——— Subjection of Women..... 6
MILLER'S Elements of Chemistry 13
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MONSELL'S Beatitudes..... 22
——— His Presence not his Memory 22
——— 'Spiritual Songs'..... 22
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——— Power of the Soul over the Body 21
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——— Course of Practical Chemistry.. 14
——— Manual of Chemistry..... 13
——— Lectures on Carbon 14
——— Outlines of Chemistry..... 14
Our Children's Story..... 25
OWEN'S Lectures on the Invertebrate Animals 13
——— Comparative Anatomy and Physiology of Vertebrated Animals.... 13

PACKE'S Guide to the Pyrenees 28
PAGET'S Lectures on Surgical Pathology .. 16
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PERKIN'S Italian and Tuscan Sculptors.... 17
PHILLIPS'S Guide to Geology 12
Pictures in Tyrol 28
PIESSE'S Art of Perfumery 18
——— Natural Magic..... 18
PRATT'S Law of Building Societies 29
PRENDERGAST'S Mastery of Languages.... 6
PRESCOTT'S Scripture Difficulties 22
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Recreations of a Country Parson..... 8
REICHEL'S See of Rome 20
REILY'S Map of Mont Blanc..... 28
REIMANN on Aniline Dyes..... 19
RILEY'S Memorials of London..... 28
RIVERS' Rose Amateur's Guide 18
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ROGER'S Correspondence of Gregson 9
——— Eclipse of Faith..... 9
——— Defence of ditto..... 9
——— Essays from the *Edinburgh Review* 9
——— Reason and Faith 9
ROGET'S English Words and Phrases..... 7
Roma Sotterranea..... 28
RONALD'S Fly-Fisher's Entomology 28
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SEEBOHM'S Oxford Reformers of 1498 2
SEWELL'S After Life 24
——— Amy Herbert 24
——— Cleve Hall..... 24
——— Earl's Daughter..... 24
——— Examination for Confirmation .. 21
——— Experience of Life 24
——— Gertrude 24
——— Glimpse of the World..... 24
——— History of the Early Church.... 24
——— Ivors 24
——— Journal of a Home Life 24
——— Katharine Ashton..... 24
——— Laneton Parsonage 24
——— Margaret Percival 24
——— Passing Thoughts on Religion .. 21
——— Preparations for Communion.... 21
——— Principles of Education..... 21
——— Readings for Confirmation 21
——— Readings for Lent..... 21

SEWELL'S Tales and Stories 24
——— Ursula 34
——— Thoughts for the Holy Week 21
SEYMOUR'S Pioneering in the Pampas 23
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——— on the Greyhound 27
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Strong and Free 10
Sunday Afternoons at the Parish Church of a Scottish University City (St. Andrews).. 9
SWEETMAN'S Through the Night, and Onward 24

TAYLOR'S (Jeremy) Works, edited by EDEN 22
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——— Religious Worship 22
Whist, what to lead, by CAM 28
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——— Consumption 15
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——— Homes without Hands 12
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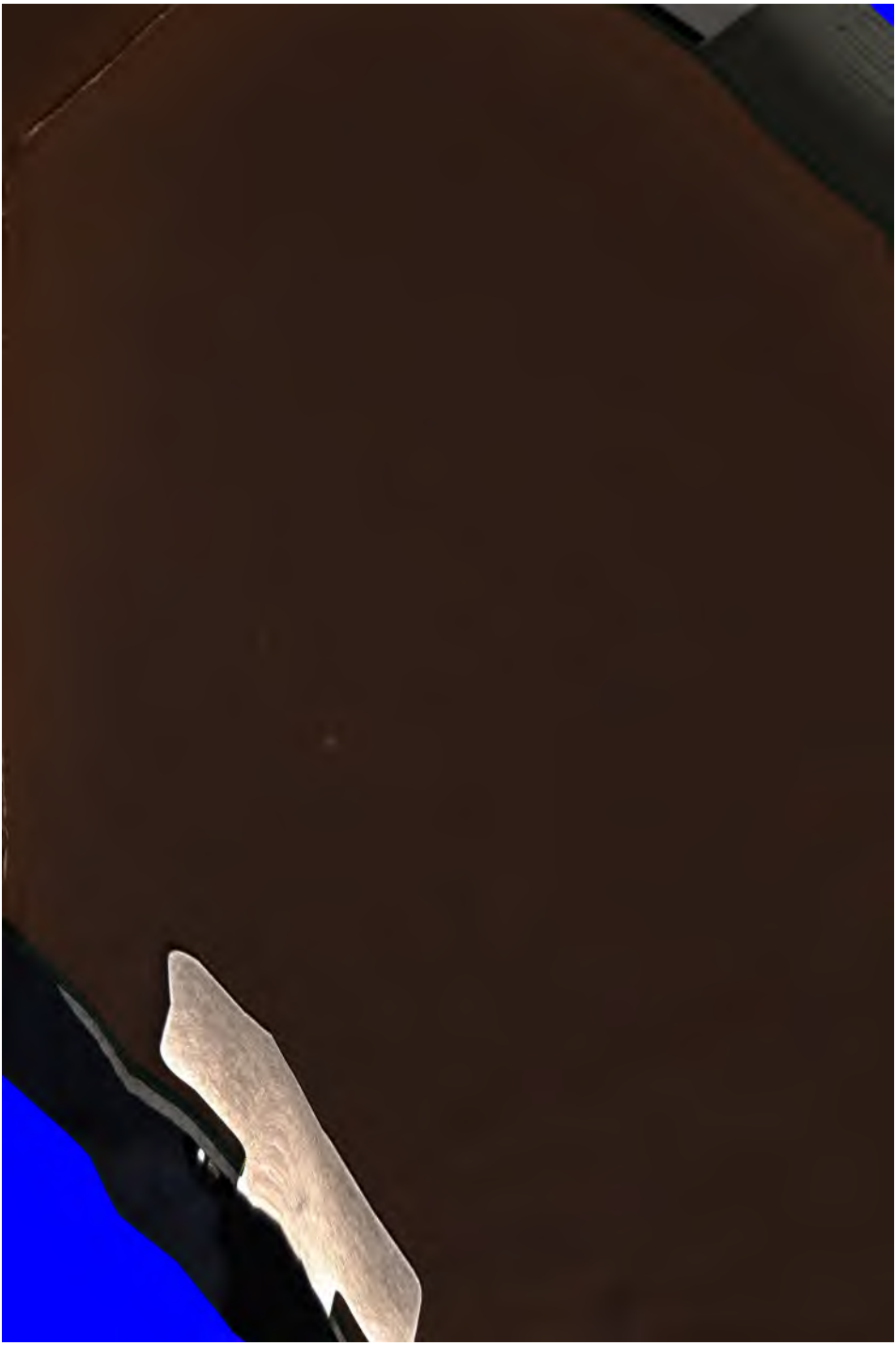
YOUATT on the Dog 27
——— on the Horse 27

ZELLER'S Socrates 6
——— Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics.. 6

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